

Uganda's progressive journey to universal access to clean water

EDITOR: Access to clean and safe water is not just a basic need.

It is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of public health, economic development, and social dignity.

For decades, rural communities in Uganda have faced persistent challenges in accessing reliable water sources, often relying on unsafe streams and ponds. This has exposed millions to waterborne diseases and hindered progress in education and livelihoods.

Today, however, Uganda is taking a bold step towards reversing this trend through the Kagera Water Works Project, a transformative initiative that underscores the Government's resolve to achieve universal access to clean water.

Supported by the French Development Agency, this project is more than an engineering feat, it is a lifeline for over 600,000 people in Mbarara city and Isingiro district, who will finally enjoy reliable and safe water.

By 2040, the number of beneficiaries is expected to rise to 900,000,

marking a significant leap towards the Sustainable Development Goal of universal water access.

The Kagera Water Works forms the backbone of this ambitious undertaking.

At its heart is a newly constructed intake on River Kagera and a modern water treatment plant at Kakamba, with a capacity of 30,000 cubic metres per day. This facility will serve both urban and rural populations, including vulnerable communities in Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee settlements.

Of this capacity, 12,000 cubic metres are earmarked for Mbarara city, while 18,000 cubic metres will supply rural Isingiro district.

The infrastructure includes a 58km transmission main, a high-capacity pumping station at Kabingo, and strategically located reservoirs such as the Bihunya tank, which sits at a higher elevation to serve areas previously beyond supply limits.

This is not just about pipes and tanks. It is about transforming lives. Clean water means fewer cases of cholera and typhoid, healthier children who can attend school, and women freed from the burden of walking long distances



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to fetch water. It means improved agricultural productivity through water for production, which is planned under a separate component. In short, it is about dignity and opportunity.

The Government's commitment does not stop at Mbarara city. Through the

Isingiro Rural Water Supply Project, now at 50% completion, the plan is to extend this lifeline deeper into rural communities.

This component, estimated at euro 58m, will deliver water through 21 distribution tanks, 10 pumping stations, and over 767km of transmission and distribution pipelines.

By tapping into the Kagera system, villages that have long depended on seasonal streams will finally have a sustainable water source.

The resolve to rehabilitate old infrastructure and expand distribution networks in Mbarara city further underscores a commitment to sustainability. Existing water treatment plants, some built over 30 years ago, are no longer adequate for a rapidly growing urban population.

The new Bihunya tank, positioned at a higher elevation, will ensure water reaches areas previously underserved, such as Katete. The National Water and Sewerage Corporation is already laying new pipes to connect these neighbourhoods, while the Government mobilises additional funds to rehabilitate wastewater systems and construct

faecal sludge treatment facilities which is a critical step for sanitation and environmental health.

Uganda's journey towards universal access to clean water is far from over, but the progress is undeniable. The Government's determination, coupled with international support, signals a future where rural communities will no longer be left behind. Clean water should not be a privilege — it must be a guarantee for every Ugandan. The Kagera Water Works Project is proof that with vision, investment, and resolve, this goal is within reach.

As we look ahead, the challenge will be maintaining this momentum — ensuring timely completion of ongoing works, expanding coverage to remote areas, and safeguarding water resources against climate change. But for now, Uganda has taken a decisive step towards a future where every citizen, regardless of location, can turn on a tap and drink water without fear.

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